

# Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers

If you visit Tryon, in Polk County, you can't miss the large horse figure at the town's main intersection. Tryon residents named the horse Morris. They dress Morris up for holidays and to match the seasons. Morris even appears in the city seal. But who made the giant horse and why? What does it say about the history of this small community in the foothills of the mountains?

The story of Morris the horse begins in 1901, when Eleanor Vance and Charlotte Yale moved to Asheville, Buncombe County. The two women began teaching wood carving to the young boys who lived in the neighborhood near George Vanderbilt's estate. By the end of that year they had established the Boys' Club of All Souls Church. Their efforts came to the attention of Mrs. George Vanderbilt. With her support, Vance and Yale formed Biltmore Estate Industries in 1905. For ten years they trained local people in traditional crafts such as weaving, woodworking, and wood carving. Under their leadership Biltmore Estate Industries established a reputation for quality craftsmanship.



*This twelve-piece circus set was made by Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers between 1920 and 1935. Courtesy of the North Carolina Museum of History.*

In 1915 Vance and Yale moved to Tryon. There they started a craft organization called Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers and began teaching young people to build furniture and toys. Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers became well-known for beautiful toys that were carved and painted by hand. Vance and another carver created the designs, and the youths who trained at the workshop were hired to make and paint the toys. They were also encouraged to experiment by designing their own toys.

In 1923 a pretty pink cottage called the Toy House was built to house the growing business and serve as a showroom. The Toy House also had a museum containing toys from around the world and a playground. Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers soon printed a catalog and began selling toys across the country. The Toy House was featured in the national press and attracted many visitors, including the wives of three presidents.

Vance and Yale sold Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers in 1936 in order to start the Tryon Craft School. Today the Toy House is a private residence.

Now, back to Morris the horse. Vance designed the horse as a giant version of one of the most popular toys made by Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers. The horse was built for the Tryon Riding and Hunt Club in 1928. It was later destroyed in a fire. Four other horses based on the original design have been built since that time.

Look around your town or city. You might discover a landmark that reveals a piece of the past. Your old toy box might hold some history, too!

Did you know that museums collect, preserve, and exhibit toys? Toys are part of history too! They help explain what kids in the past were interested in and how they lived and played. The North Carolina Museum of History's collection includes toys from the Tryon Toy-Makers and Wood-Carvers. It also contains tea sets, puzzles, slingshots, stuffed animals, toy cars and trucks, dolls and dollhouses, mechanical toys, video games, kids' furniture, and more. Which of today's toys do you think might be in a museum one day?